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## Transformation and Strategic Surprise

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# **TRANSFORMATION AND STRATEGIC SURPRISE**

**Colin S. Gray**

**April 2005**

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## FOREWORD

The possibility of achieving decisive results from short warning attacks appears to have improved greatly with technological advances. Indeed, strategic surprise offers both golden opportunities and lethal dangers, so it attracts much attention in today's world.

In this monograph, Dr. Colin Gray takes a broad view of strategic surprise, and relates it to the current military transformation. He argues that the kind of strategic surprise to which the United States is most at risk and which is most damaging to our national security is the deep and pervasive connection between war and politics. Although America is usually superior at making war, it is far less superior in making peace out of war. Dr. Gray concludes that the current military transformation shows no plausible promise of helping to correct the long-standing U.S. weakness in the proper use of forces as an instrument of policy.

This monograph was written under the Strategic Studies Institute's External Research Associates Program (ERAP). It is intended to stimulate debate on the role of policy in the exercise of war.



DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

COLIN S. GRAY is Professor of International Politics and Strategic Studies at the University of Reading, England. He worked at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (London), and at Hudson Institute (Croton-on-Hudson, NY), before founding a defense-oriented think tank in the Washington area, the National Institute for Public Policy. Dr. Gray served for 5 years in the Reagan administration on the President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. He has served as an adviser both to the U.S. and the British governments (he has dual citizenship). His government work has included studies of nuclear strategy, arms control policy, maritime strategy, space strategy, and the use of special forces. Dr. Gray has written 19 books, most recently *The Sheriff: America's Defense of the New World Order* (University Press of Kentucky, 2004), and *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (Frank Cass, 2002). In 2005 he will publish *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson), as well as a diverse collection of his writings on strategy. Dr. Gray is a graduate of the Universities of Manchester and Oxford.

## SUMMARY

Though discounted by Clausewitz in the circumstances of his era, strategic surprise has enjoyed considerable popularity over the past century. The possibility of achieving decisive results from attacks launched on short, or zero, warning has appeared to improve greatly with advances in technology. It follows that surprise has been recognized as offering what seem to be both golden opportunities and lethal dangers. Since surprise is an ironbound necessity for the tactical success of terrorism, it is understandable that it attracts a major degree of attention today. There is no real novelty about this. After all, for 40 years the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies perpetually worried about surprise attack on the Central Front in Europe, as well as about a surprise first strike designed to disarm the United States of its ability to retaliate with its strategic nuclear forces.

As a general rule, this monograph does not repeat or attempt to second guess the existing scholarship on how to correct bureaucratic and other pathologies in the world of intelligence. Furthermore, it does not contest the declared purposes or the details of the Army's radical transformation plan, both of which it judges to be admirable. It is not that kind of analysis. Instead, this discussion takes an unusually broad view of the problem, actually the condition, of strategic surprise, and relates it to the process of military transformation that currently is still in its early stages. The analysis has a strong thesis and conclusion. Specifically, it argues that in period after period, and with few exceptions in war after war, the kind of strategic surprise to which the United States is most at risk, and which is most damaging to U.S. national security, is the unexpected depth and pervasiveness of the connection between war and politics. Americans usually are superior in making war: they are far less superior in making the peace that they want out of the war that they wage.

The monograph argues that the current military transformation, though certainly welcome, cannot itself correct the long-standing U.S. weakness in the proper use of force as an instrument of policy. The discussion claims that, notwithstanding its probable virtues in the enhancement of military prowess, the current military transformation bids fair to be irrelevant to America's really serious strategic problem or condition. What the global superpower needs is a military establishment that it can use in ways conducive to the standards of international order it seeks to uphold, and with the political consequences that U.S. policy intends. Whether that establishment is more, or less, network-centric, or has, more or less, on-call precision firepower, truly is a matter of less than overwhelming importance.

Politics rules! More accurately phrased, perhaps, policy should rule! War is political behavior that must serve policy. Since the conduct of war should not be a self-regarding apolitical activity, preparation for it in peacetime, as well as its exercise in anger, needs to be suffused with the sense of purpose that is provided only by the realm of policy. To summarize: this monograph has taken no issue with the grand design of the transforming Army, rather the salient topics are the use made of the Army by American policymakers, and the way that the Army chooses to behave, both in combat and afterwards.

The argument unfolds cumulatively with seven points presented in all but self-explanatory, descriptive language.

### **Bureaucratic Reform.**

*1. Reorganization of intelligence bureaucracies can be useful, but is only of marginal importance for reduction in the risks of strategic surprise.*

There is always room for bureaucratic improvement. But every reorganization for reform brings its own pathologies. If we are looking for areas of behavior wherein truly significant improvement can be made in meeting the challenge of potential strategic surprise, bureaucratic reform is not among them. Of course, there are administrative reforms that do make a difference; for example, those that affect career and promotion patterns, and hence shape the traffic flow of high talent. However, defense against the kind of strategic surprise to which the United States is most vulnerable, the unexpected political consequences of military behavior, is best provided by strategic education, not reorganization.

### **Understanding the Condition.**

*2. Surprise effect, not surprise, is the challenge.*

The problem is not surprise. Surprise happens! — to adapt the common exclamation. Rather the problem is the effects of surprise. Surprise, by definition, is in the hands of our enemies who are attempting to paralyze the dialectic of war. But the effects of surprise, by and large, are in our hands. We cannot aspire to be surprise-proof. We can, however, aim to be proofed against many, perhaps most, of the malign effects of surprise.

*3. Some unpleasant surprises should be readily avoidable.*

War and warfare tend to be confused one with the other. The fact that there is much more to war than the waging of warfare is the core of the American difficulty in using its military power for desired political

outcomes. Better understanding of the connection between war and peace, and between the waging of warfare and the kind of postwar settlement intended, would hugely reduce the incidence and severity of unpleasant strategic surprise for U.S. statecraft. The relationship between policy and military action inherently is a tense one. They are distinctive realms, commanded technically by different rules and values. Nonetheless, the conduct of warfare must be guided by policy, though policy must be prepared to be disciplined by military practicalities. Poverty in the necessary dialogue between policy and the military helps produce, indeed all but guarantees, adverse strategic surprise.

### **Levels of Analysis.**

#### *4. The geopolitical context is the most important.*

Strategic surprise is the product, ultimately, of a particular geopolitical context. Technological surprise is improbable, though the use of internationally common technologies in surprising ways is a near certainty. Diverse strategic and military cultures, reflecting their unique geopolitical circumstances, will adapt new technologies and ideas to fit their distinctive needs. The threat or use of force is a political act deriving from a political, or geopolitical, context. At root, such threat or use is not a technological or cultural action. Strategic surprise may well have a technological dimension, but it will not be the product, or the expression, of technology. By way of contrast, such surprise is certain to have a cultural dimension, in the sense that culture must contribute to the making and the content of policy. Statecraft, and war as one of its agents, are political behaviors, conducted for policy ends. No matter how prominent the technological or cultural factors appear to be, the behaviors are political. They are intended to have geopolitical effect.

### **Conclusions: Implications for the Army.**

#### *5. Do not exaggerate the dangers from surprise.*

Surprise, even strategic surprise, is not a panacea solution to the uncertainties of war, or the strengths of the enemy. History records few cases where decisive victory was achieved as a result of the achievement of successful strategic surprise. Even when surprise is secured, so what? What are its strategic benefits, its effects? If we are alert and flexibly adaptive, we should be able to ensure that no enemy who catches us by strategic surprise would profit by the deed. That said, it is possible that the unprecedentedly interconnected world of the 21st century is, as a



consequence, unprecedentedly vulnerable to the ripple effect of strategic surprise. What once were local events now can have a global resonance. We are respectful of this view, but not thoroughly persuaded that it accurately expresses a historical change of great moment for our argument.

*6. Minimum regrets must be a guiding principle.*

Defense planners cannot aspire to design and procure the uniquely “right” force posture for the future. They can and should, however, aim to get the really Big Things right enough. The most suitable blessing for a defense planner is, “may all your errors be small ones.” In transforming the Army for the 21st century, the appropriate ambition is to design a posture that will never be the cause of major regrets for “might and should have beens.” The Army’s transformation plan, privileging flexibility and agility, should minimize the danger of being caught on the wrong side of truly major decisions.

*7. The operational level of warfare is not the whole of war. Is the U.S. Army pursuing the most appropriate vision in its transformation?*

The transformation needed most urgently in the Army is in its suitability as the primary policy instrument of the sheriff of world order. The transformation now underway in all of the Armed Forces, including the Army, necessarily has as a prominent feature, the further leveraging of information technology (IT) so that the troops can do even better what they do superbly well already. America’s most pressing strategic problem, really a condition so persistent, is that time after time military prowess is not employed as effectively as it should be in the service of policy. This is the zone of strategic surprise that potentially could prove fatal to America’s role as *the* principal ordering agent that the world requires. The challenge is partly for the Army to be adaptable to diverse political contexts, and to be able to undertake missions that transcend traditional warfighting. With its planned transformation, the Services would seem to have recognized these challenges and to have stepped up boldly to remake themselves to meet them. Just how successful the Army will prove to be in its proclaimed goal of changing its culture remains to be seen. *The greater challenge, however, is for America’s policymakers to understand:* (1) the strengths and limitations of the military instrument that they are using; (2) the nature and character of war; and (3) the cultural attitudes both of our enemies and of ourselves. Transformation is most needed in an enhanced adaptability for effectiveness in different political circumstances. Policymakers must only resort to force with a careful regard to the desired political consequences and with a sustained will to license the actions necessary to achieve them.

# TRANSFORMATION AND STRATEGIC SURPRISE

Just when we found the answer, they changed the question.

Anonymous

We judge the unknown to be unlikely.

S. Douglas Smith, 2004<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to predict the future, and all attempts to do so in any detail appear ludicrous within a few years.

Arthur C. Clarke, 1962<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

As a highly pragmatic discipline, strategic studies follows events, both those that are actual and those that are widely anticipated. The concept of surprise is intellectually fashionable today. However, it is not at all self-evident what the practical implications are or ought to be. In common with its conceptual stablemate, asymmetry, surprise defines a content-free zone. It has no inherent meaning, save with respect to its logical opposite. Surprise and asymmetry must be defined solely with reference to what they are not. This rather unhelpful, academic seeming, point happens to have major real-world implications. The defense community has signed on for yet another big idea that it is ill equipped to pursue purposefully, if indeed such pursuit is feasible at all.

Historically, American strategic theorists and defense analysts have taken their cues from the signals of concern transmitted by officials. Those official signals typically have been triggered by events. For example, the entire conceptual edifice of the theory of stable mutual deterrence was created in the 1950s, following the first public explanation of a coherent U.S. nuclear strategy by the Eisenhower administration in 1953-54.<sup>3</sup> The administration was seeking to incorporate nuclear weapons into national strategy, in the context of

the lessons of the war just concluded, at least frozen by an armistice, in Korea; the development of fusion weapons; the expansion of the nuclear stockpile; and, of course, the growth of the Soviet nuclear threat in quantity and quality.<sup>4</sup> In the mid 1970s, there was a brief flurry of analytical interest in the problems of surprise attack, with specific reference to the possibility of Soviet forces in Europe catching the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) unawares on the Central Front of the inner-German border.<sup>5</sup> Moving fast-forward to today, a U.S. defense community, civilian and military, that traditionally has been all but comprehensively uninterested in irregular warfare, now has rushed predictably to where the policy action is most lively, and the money is most readily accessible.

Only a few years ago, the writing of books and other studies on terrorism was a distinctly minority pursuit in the intellectual wing of the defense community. Today, such an endeavor is virtually mandatory if one aspires to be a part of the fashionable, and funded, crowd. Whereas even in the 1990s, let alone during the Cold War decades, experts on terrorism and other forms of irregular warfare were exceedingly thin on the ground, now they are truly abundant. Indeed, today it is rare to find a defense expert who does not claim counterterrorist competency in his or her portfolio of professional skills.

A problem with intellectual fashion is that, by its very nature, it must change. In the case of national defense, it will change as policymakers react to the circumstances that beset them. The official, and attendant-dependent, worldview moves on, leaving in its wake yesterday's Big Idea. In the field of war and strategy, there are no new ideas. Rather there is a storehouse of concepts and theories which are the products of two and a half millennia of intellectual and pragmatic rumination on strategic experience. "Ideas persons," intellectual leaders perhaps, for the U.S. defense community go to that storehouse periodically and rediscover the high merit in some well-known, but probably long neglected, notion. This is how it is with strategic surprise and, indeed, with its conceptual fellow traveller, the asymmetric threat.<sup>6</sup>

Lest some readers believe that this author has strayed into exaggeration with his claims for the contemporary authority of the notion of surprise, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld can be quoted to settle the issue. Aside from the swipe at the previous administration, the Secretary's words express a view that now is

consensual across the political spectrum. In his *Annual Report* for 2002 he advised as follows:

Well before the events of September [2001], senior Defense Department officials, through the vehicle of the *Quadrennial Defense Review*, determined that contending with uncertainty must be a central tenet in U.S. defense planning. Too much of the Department's planning over the decade of the 1990s had focused on a few familiar dangers rather than the broad array of potential challenges of consequence to U.S. interests and the nation's inherent vulnerability to asymmetric attacks. They concluded that U.S. defense planning must assume that surprise is the norm, rather than the exception. Adapting to surprise—adapting quickly and decisively—must be a hallmark of 21st century defense planning.<sup>7</sup>

Since terrorism has been identified as the defining threat of this era, and since it can only succeed by surprise, it has to follow, syllogistically, that surprise is a, if not the, master strategic concept or principle of our time. Unfortunately, surprise, along with such other Big Ideas as asymmetry, uncertainty, and friction, for a few examples, is not easy to operationalize outside a narrow band of tactical parameters.<sup>8</sup> The superpowers could, and did, procure and operate diverse and complex strategic force postures which were designed to deny success to a would-be surprise attacker. The military challenge was eminently quantifiable, at least it appeared to be so. But, what is one to make of, let alone do with, the official advice that surprise is the norm? That sensible sounding declamation is about as useful as the oxymoronic maxim to “expect the unexpected.”

The purpose of this monograph is to make a modest contribution to improving understanding of strategic surprise, especially with reference to the process of military transformation. I believe that the idea frequently is wrongly conceptualized, that errors in basic understanding can promote undue pessimism on our part, and that the whole subject is overdue for a complete review. With a mind, ultimately, to the implications of my argument for the armed forces in general, and the Army in particular, this monograph attempts to stimulate and contribute to just such a review.

The discussion is organized into subjects which accommodate a total argument with seven points, three of them serving as conclusions. As a roadmap to what follows, I will close this introduction with a summary of the major points explored and advanced below.

## **Bureaucratic Reform.**

1. Reorganization of intelligence bureaucracies can be useful, but is only marginally important for reduction in the risks of strategic surprise.

## **Understanding the Condition.**

- 2. Surprise effect, not surprise, is the challenge.
- 3. Some unpleasant surprises are reliably avoidable.

## **Levels of Analysis.**

- 4. The geopolitical context is the most important.

## **Conclusions: Implications for the Army.**

- 5. Do not exaggerate the dangers from surprise.
- 6. Minimum regrets must be a guiding principle.
- 7. The operational level of warfare is not the whole of war. An attractive and persuasive vision of a transformed Army, though an essential forward step, in itself is no guarantee of military behavior strongly supportive of political goals.

These seven points cumulatively expose the nature of the problem, or condition, of strategic surprise. They are guided by a sustained focus upon an attempt to improve the Army's appreciation of the challenge of strategic surprise. From that appreciation should flow an improved understanding of how it may need to behave with its transformed force so as to be more responsive to the demands that policy may send its way.<sup>9</sup>

To launch the substance of this enquiry in the appropriate spirit, we will quote the immortal wisdom of Yogi Berra. Yogi offered advice for the ages when he said, or is reported to have said, "prediction is difficult, particularly about the future."

## Bureaucratic Reform.

1. *Reorganization of intelligence bureaucracies can be useful, but is only of marginal importance for reduction in the risks of strategic surprise.* There is always a case for some bureaucratic reorganization intended to achieve the kind of reform that should lead to improved performance. But historical experience and common sense tell us that the intelligent and praiseworthy urge to reorganize for reform is near certain to disappoint. Whereas, on the one hand, better organization should yield a better intelligence product, on the other, such improvement is more likely to be only of marginal value. Bureaucratic reform endeavors typically are motivated more by the political necessity to be seen to be doing something about a recent intelligence failure, than they are by a serious and sincere determination to make a difference. The truth is that there are systemic reasons why bureaucratic reform, no matter how well designed and executed, is close to irrelevant to the problem of coping with strategic surprise, particularly the kind of political surprise that is the focus of this monograph.

This is not to deny that suitable reforms should treat a few of the endemic pathologies of the intelligence and warning community, at least for a while. Certainly it is possible that a reformed intelligence community could save the country grief on occasion;<sup>10</sup> indeed, the Central Intelligence Agency was designed with just such a purpose in mind. Such a community would be so structured as to encourage both information sharing and competitive assessments, as well as to ensure a proper professional separation between the producer and the user of information. This monograph is not at all hostile to the reform of the intelligence community. I do insist, however, that the preferred pathway to coping with the difficulties of surprise does not lead through bureaucratic reform.

As this inquiry will make all too plain, bureaucratic reform simply cannot address the real problems. Those problems, and such solutions and alleviation as we can identify, are beyond the reach of administrative reshuffles. They have to do with the very nature of the subject of surprise and the reasons why it can be so dangerous. Also, they derive from the facts that, for good and ill with regard to intelligence, our analysts must function culturally as Americans within the embrace of a hugely decentralized structure of central government.

It is worth noting that those latter potential hindrances are relatively minor when compared with the point registered previously. The true source of difficulty lies with the nature of the subject of strategic surprise.

For laudable reasons, politicians and officials are always in search of ways to control events. The adoption of stable deterrence as the jewel in the crown of America's Cold War strategic policy is a classic example of this desire made into policy. Today, although deterrence has lost some of its former glitter,<sup>11</sup> the U.S. Government is still very much in the would-be control business. Strategies of prevention and preemption are examples of ideas for the physical control of the military capabilities of polities judged to be threatening. Alas, preemption, understood correctly as attacking first in the last resort, requires a thoroughly reliable quality of warning that rarely is attainable. Even forcible prevention, which translates as shoot on strong suspicion, could be held to demand an improbable measure of certainty about intelligence information. The uncomfortable fact is that until an enemy actually initiates an attack, a decision to beat him to the punch, by minutes, days, or months and years, unavoidably has to be based on a leap of faith. No scheme to reorganize and reform the intelligence bureaucracies can alter that fundamental reality.

Today it is orthodox to condemn the intelligence community for relying too heavily upon technology in its information gathering. That criticism is well-justified, provided it is not allowed to feed another error. Human intelligence is not a panacea solution to the problem of deficient information. Those who would engineer, or "fix," America's intelligence and warning difficulties by shifting the balance between machines and people in favor of the latter, need to be reminded of some inconvenient facts. To cite but a few:

- People take years to train, and many more years to penetrate an alien society and secure positions of trust in which they might learn useful things.
- People, especially if recruited locally, will often be the subject of some residual suspicion as to their loyalty.
- The possibility of the U.S., and Allied, intelligence community having the right people in the right places at the right time, is something of a long-shot.

The U.S. Government may be told what historical records later reveal to have been the truth, that an enemy had the intention of attacking. But would policymakers in Washington either distinguish the “signals” from the “noise,” or have sufficient confidence in the “signals” that were recognized as such to take preventive action?<sup>12</sup> Until an attack actually unfolds, one can always hope that the warning signs do not really mean what they appear to indicate. Also, one can choose to “go the extra mile for peace,” albeit in the teeth of apparent evidence of malign intent, and hope that something will turn up to divert the would-be attacker from his course. Perhaps he is bluffing!

Critics are right. For at least 30 years the United States has overvalued the technical means of information gathering, at the expense of the human. The critics would not be correct, however, were they to try to insist that a major rebalancing of effort in favor of human spies would have a truly significant consequence for the country’s ability to avoid, prevent, or preempt strategic surprise.

American culture, including its strategic and military culture(s), has long been highly machine-minded. It is attracted to the definition of conditions as problems that lend themselves to assault by the Yankee know-how that produces the “engineering fix.” In many cases, this national self-confidence, determination, and optimism achieves wonders. But, there is a banal sounding yet profound maxim before the wisdom of which even a proud superpower is compelled to bow: “the impossible really is impossible.” Reform of the intelligence community and its ways of doing business might be of some marginal utility, though it is well to heed the caveat that such reform has a way of balancing the improvements that it implements with new bureaucratic pathologies. One should never forget the authority of the law of unintended consequences. Purveyors of bright new, or old but refurbished, ideas to improve intelligence as a barrier against strategic surprise might with profit heed these words by philosopher John Gray: “The history of ideas obeys a law of irony. Ideas have consequences; but rarely those their authors expect or desire, and never only those. Quite often they are the opposite.”<sup>13</sup>

From Carl von Clausewitz to Rear Admiral J. C. Wylie, USN, great strategic theorists have pointed to *control* as being the essence of the practical object in war, the purpose of strategic effect.<sup>14</sup> The subject of this monograph, at root, is how better might we control the dangers that imperil our security. Because of its current, partial hegemonic,



status as well as for reasons of its national culture, strategic and military *inter alia*, the United States is especially vulnerable to seduction by unsound ideas. A democratic country burdened with great security tasks will never find itself short of advice. The market for palliatives is open for trading. Its global responsibilities, and the vulnerabilities that attend them, as well as its traditional problem-solving optimism, mandate great caution in approaching the challenge of strategic surprise. Wishful thinking and ethnocentrism conflate potentially to mislead. Unfortunately, it is one thing to recognize the unhelpful influence of national culture, it is quite another to identify practical ways to correct for that source of pervasive bias. We are what we are. The U.S. Government can reorganize itself in any way that the political process will tolerate, but it must continue to be operated by those who are culturally American. One senses that possibly the authors of the U.S. Army's excellent design for radical transformation, including the commitment literally to "transform its culture," may need to take more account than they anticipate of their national proclivities.<sup>15</sup>

Strategic surprise can, with some good fortune, be controlled in its consequences, as this monograph will reveal and argue. However, that control cannot be advanced significantly by the "fix" of bureaucratic reorganization and reform. Indeed, as we have suggested already, new organizational and command structures in the intelligence world are likely to generate new difficulties that will offset much of the benefit anticipated to flow from the reforms.

The producers and the consumers of intelligence need to keep their distance, if the product is not to be contaminated by the beliefs and concerns of policymakers. In principle, the intelligence product can be protected from policy bias. But in practice, it is close to impossible to avoid the shaping and coloration of intelligence both by the policy of the moment and, no less significantly, by the assumptions that are current and authoritative within the defense community as a whole. And that is to ignore the phenomenon of deliberate attempts by policymakers to encourage the delivery of an intelligence product supportive of their beliefs and intentions. Human nature and the political process usually triumphs over organizational reform.

If strategic surprise is defined as a problem in want of "fixing," then the mission is indeed beyond rescue. Some readers may believe, or suspect, that strategic surprise as a problem really can be hugely

alleviated, if not definitively solved, by the right mix of technical or administrative advances. To answer those optimists, I offer an historical observation. A century of cumulatively monumental change in technology and governmental organization has had no appreciable effect upon the U.S. ability to eliminate the danger of strategic surprise. 9/11 speaks for itself. The prosecution rests.

Fortunately, though, the mission of coping well enough with strategic surprise is far from hopeless, always provided it is conceptualized properly and approached with due respect for its nature. That optimistic judgment, aspiration perhaps, leads directly to the next section.

## **Understanding the Problem.**

2. *Surprise effect, not surprise, is the challenge.* Surprise happens! To adapt the vulgar bumper sticker message. History's nonlinearities, acts of God, the transmutation of familiar trends into something quite different, the "normal accidents" that afflict all complex systems,<sup>16</sup> and the cunning plans of devious foes, all can surprise us. But surprise is not really the problem. In fact, surprise is not a problem at all, rather a condition of the insecurity in which we must live. By analogy, superior intelligence, per se, is toothless, because there has to be someone at the sharp end to use it to inflict pain on the enemy. Similarly, surprise, per se, is of little, if any, value. The question is always, "what are its consequences?" In a quite brilliant brief analysis, James Wirtz penetrates much of the way to the heart of our subject. He explains that,

Surprise temporarily suspends the dialectical nature of warfare (or any other strategic contest) by eliminating an active opponent from the battlefield. Surprise turns war into a stochastic exercise in which the probability of some event can be determined with a degree of certainty or, more rarely, an event in which the outcome can be not only known in advance, but determined by one side in the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Surprise attack has the potential to suspend war's nature as a duel, by eliminating its dialectic. Thus might Clausewitz be confounded. In practice, though, it is exceedingly rare for a belligerent to be eliminated totally as a consequence of surprise. Ideally, a surprise assault would render its target enemy an all but helpless victim, unable to recover

from the initial disadvantage in which it was placed. Theoretically, this idea is more than faintly reminiscent of the basic idea behind John Boyd's observation, orientation, decision, action (OODA) loop.<sup>18</sup> By a surprising speed in our OODA cycle, we will begin, and remain, within the action or reaction time of the like cycle of the enemy. He will never be able to recover. So much for theory and high aspiration. Boyd extrapolated from tactical air combat into the far more rarefied zones of strategy and policy. A belligerent may be tactically, even operationally, vulnerable to surprise, yet still be strategically highly resilient. Witness the grim experience of the Soviet Union in 1941. A theory that is sound at the tactical and operational levels, is apt to be thwarted by the factors of time, distance, and scale, at the strategic.

By definition, surprise is controlled by the enemy. He has the initiative. If this were not so, the events in question would not be surprises. But, the consequences of surprise are controlled by us, not the enemy. Only in the rarest of cases is a strategic or operational level surprise itself so damaging that the defender is rendered incapable of recovery. Whether or not recovery is possible must depend upon both moral and physical factors. In 1940 and 1941, both Britain and the Soviet Union would have fallen along with France, had their national geographies not gifted them the barriers of water or sheer distance which provided time for recovery.

It is understandable, and indeed necessary, for the intelligence community to strive as best it is able to prevent our being surprised by malevolent foes. After all, if there is no surprise, there can be none of surprise's potentially harmful, even deadly, consequences. However, surprise prevention, though an important goal, is mission impossible, at least it is if we harbor absurd ambitions to inhabit a risk-free security environment. It must follow that the defense community as a whole has no practical choice other than to accept that surprise happens; it is a condition of doing national security business. This is not a feature unique to the contemporary world. Surprise has always been an actual or potential characteristic of warfare. This has to be so because since "[w]ar is nothing but a duel on a larger scale," in the ageless words of the Prussian master.<sup>19</sup> Clausewitz explains that "[c]ountless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will." Duelling enemies must ever be motivated to try to behave in a manner that "eliminates war's dialectic."<sup>20</sup> The feasibility

of surprise at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of conflict will shift with technology, but in theory at least its attractions remain constant. We should hasten to add that its potential disadvantages also persist through time. This is not the right juncture at which to pursue in detail the possible downside of surprise. Two maxims will suffice for now to convey much of that downside: “nothing is so apt to fail as incomplete success”; and “you need to kill a king, not offer him insult and injury.”

Basil Liddell Hart stated the vital distinction that I am emphasizing in his analysis of the British victory in the Battle of Messines on June 7, 1917. The British assault was anything but a surprise. “The bombardment and wire-cutting’ began on May 21st, were developed on May 28th, and culminated in a 7-days’ intense bombardment, mingled with practice barrages to test the arrangements.”<sup>21</sup> General Plumer’s Second Army had virtually sent the Germans an invitation to the fight. But, as Liddell Hart explains,

The consequent forfeiture of surprise did not matter in the Messines stroke, a purely limited attack, in contrast to that at Arras, where it had been fatal to the hope of a breakthrough. For although there was no surprise there was surprise effect . . . produced by the mines [19 of them!] and the overwhelming fire. . . and this lasted long enough to gain the short-distanced objectives that had been set. *The point, and the distinction between actual surprise and surprise effect, are of significance to the theory of warfare.*<sup>22</sup>

The distinction advertised so clearly by Liddell Hart is indeed of great significance. The effects of surprise were limited severely in 1917 by the technological deficiencies of the day. Because they lacked mobility, armies were unable to exploit tactical success rapidly for operational advantage. Also, generals were hampered fatally by the absence of reliable real-time communications. By the time of the second great war of the 20th century, technology and doctrine had largely alleviated those inhibitors of 1917.<sup>23</sup>

I am suggesting strongly that our problem is not surprise and its frustration. Indeed, it is more sensible to regard surprise as a condition rather than a problem. Instead, our problem is to cope well enough with the effects of those surprises that we are bound to fail to prevent. It is important to add that the challenge of surprise effect includes the case addressed in the quotations from Liddell Hart. Even when we

are not really surprised by, for example, the failure of an attempt to dissuade, deter, or coerce short of the use of force, still we could be hugely surprised by the actions the enemy takes and, above all else, by their effects.

Notwithstanding the contemporary prominence accorded what is misnamed as preemption, it is a near certainty that, as a general rule, the United States and its friends and allies will not often be the initiators of military action. Of course, in theory at least there is a class of strategic challenge that points the other way. In its *Final Report*, the 9/11 Commission offered the following as the first of its recommendations:

The U.S. Government must identify and prioritize actual or potential terrorist sanctuaries. For each, it should have a realistic strategy to keep possible terrorists insecure and on the run, using all elements of national power. We should reach out, listen to, and work with other countries that can help.<sup>24</sup>

Those ambivalent words appear to advise sending U.S. marshals (and bounty hunters?) into bandit country to get the bad guys. But also they seem to reflect some reluctance to “do the business,” to find and kill terrorists. Even the mighty United States cannot flout the lore of war and strategy with impunity. Strategists of many nations have sought the silver bullet, the magic formula, truly the all purpose panacea, that should deliver certain victory. Did not the Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini promise victory to the army that behaved according to the correct principles, especially according to *his* great principle?<sup>25</sup> Recall that in 2003 the U.S. attack on Iraq was anything but a surprise. However, there were those in Washington who believed, at least seriously entertained the hope, that an opening “shock and awe” bombardment from the air, would have the surprise *effect* of rendering the enemy either incapable of resistance or unwilling to resist.<sup>26</sup> It failed. Moreover, it was thoroughly misconceived as an approach to a conflict wherein the United States was seeking to liberate and not to conquer. The belief in panacea solutions to war’s inconvenient complexities and complications is apparently eternal. Neither the killing of terrorists largely by our unilateral efforts, nor reaching out, listening, and working with allies, will function as a wonder drug. However, both are needed.

Conceptually, we have stressed the need to distinguish between surprise and surprise effect. In a more practical vein, we will offer the reminder that, prominent among the strategist's analytical weapons, should be a skeptical mindset and a readiness to pose the challenging question, "so what?" To be caught by surprise is no disgrace for a superpower that has accepted a global domain for its security interests and therefore responsibilities.<sup>27</sup> Some of the surprises in America's future will be agreeable, many will be of no particular consequence, while a few, inevitably, will bear upon issues of significant, even vital, national concern. The challenge to the defense planner and strategist is not to avoid being surprised. Rather it is to plan against some of the more dire potential effects of surprise.

The logic of the argument is inexorable. Since surprise cannot be prevented reliably, there is simply no alternative to our focusing upon its potential consequences. Fortunately, though, with the noteworthy exception of a nuclear attack on a large scale, it is highly improbable that strategic surprise would achieve useful, let alone conclusive, strategic ends for its perpetrator. It has to follow that our attention should be drawn far more to the possible consequences of surprise, than to a forlorn hope to frustrate its achievement. The U.S. Army cannot transform itself precisely into the "right" force for a future that we know must contain many surprising duties. But, that Army can transform itself so that it is "right enough," which is to say sufficiently adaptable, to cope well enough with the effects of a genuinely wide range of demanding missions. Of particular importance is the need for the Army to consider the surprising effects of its own action, and inaction, in the actual conduct of war. As this monograph develops later, the possible surprise effects that should be of most concern are political in nature. Waging warfare is political behavior, albeit with military tools. Policy is not the responsibility of the Army, but the ways in which the Army fights must have profound political consequences.

3. *Some unpleasant surprises should be reliably avoidable.* Clausewitz tells us that "[n]o other human activity [than war] is so continuously and universally bound up with chance. And through the element of chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war."<sup>28</sup> Because "[w]ar is the realm of chance,"<sup>29</sup> meaning that uncertainty is apt to rule, it is essential that we eliminate such among the risks as lend themselves to accurate assessment. Most important of all is the need

to correct avoidable ignorance. The enemy may well surprise us, with both his initiatives and their effects, but if we fail to grasp the nature and purpose of war, we are guilty of inflicting the severest penalties on our forces. If the nature of war is not understood correctly, then policy, which is to say the purpose of it all, is likely to be frustrated, and lives and treasure will be sacrificed in vain.

This section of the analysis levels a charge at, and poses a question to, the U.S. Armed Forces. The charge is that war and warfare not infrequently have been confused, with the result that Antulio J. Echevarria II highlighted in his study, *Toward an American Way of War*. Building on Russell Weigley's respected work on *The American Way of War*, Echevarria brings the American story up to date.

Their [the Americans in Weigley's book] concept of war rarely extended beyond the winning of battles and campaigns to the gritty work of turning military victory into strategic success, and hence was more a way of *battle* than an actual way of war. Unfortunately, the American way of battle has not yet matured into a way of war.<sup>30</sup>

There is, of course, another and contrasting American way of war, as Echevarria correctly notes. In its extensive historical experience of irregular warfare, which is to say of warfare against irregulars, the U.S. Armed Forces were rarely able to defeat their enemies by decisive maneuver and conclusive battle.<sup>31</sup> There is no doubt, though, that the Napoleonic ideal of successful warmaking has been iconic. It is uncontentious to claim, by analogy, that in the 20th century, Germany proved exceptionally competent in the bloody trade of fighting, yet, fortunately, outstandingly incompetent at making war. To lose one world war in a 30-year period might be attributed to bad luck, but to lose two requires a more systemic explanation. The United States betrays some disturbing elements of the problems that Germany failed to recognize and correct. Tersely put, the United States has been better at waging warfare than it is at conducting war for its only legitimate purposes, which must be political.<sup>32</sup>

I will brave the possible ire of some readers by going further than does Echevarria in his persuasive critique. He charges the dominant American way of war, past *and present*, with resting on a concept of war that fails to make the necessary connection between military and strategic success. That charge is well made, but it does not go

far enough. The purpose of war is not strategic, rather it is political, success. Moreover, the object of war, as Liddell Hart insisted, should be “a better peace.”<sup>33</sup> He was expressing the core rationale of the long traditional religious concepts of *Jus ad bellum* and *Jus in bello*. In other words, war is about the peace that follows. Necessarily, in this perspective, warfare must be waged with a mind to the character of the postwar settlement that is sought.

This section levels one charge and poses one question. The charge, that war and warfare are apt to be confused by the U.S. Armed Forces and by the civilians who oversee and direct them, is somewhat controversial. By contrast, my question may attract an answer that is controversial in the extreme. Stated bluntly: “Is the U.S. defense establishment insufficiently committed to effecting the right transformation?” Appearances to the contrary, perhaps, this is not to criticize the Army’s transformation plans, still less the sensible words, even near revolutionary sentiments, with which those plans are explained. Rather, their cause is to worry lest a more agile and adaptable Army will be employed in such a way that it commits old sins against the political-military lore of war in more effective ways. I suggest that the impressive Army transformation that is underway, particularly its determination to alter the mindset in favor of Joint and Expeditionary campaigning,<sup>34</sup> is not really the transformation most needed by the country. What the American sheriff requires most is a transformation in its ability to threaten or employ force to advance its political goals. It is difficult to avoid noticing that the various “roadmaps” to transformation, not excluding the claimed *Strategic Approach* of the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Office of Force Transformation, provide no very convincing linkage between military excellence and ultimate political benefit—or even just recognition that such linkage is of the utmost importance.<sup>35</sup> In fact, it is precisely and strictly that linkage that legitimizes and gives meaning to military behavior. A cynic, perhaps a skeptic, might be excused observing that the U.S. military is in the process of improving its ability to do that which it already does well. That military is unsurpassed in decisive maneuver and the delivery of precise firepower. And those abilities really matter, one must hasten to add. Moreover, it is probable that a transforming Army will be more capable of waging war both against irregular enemies, as well as against regular foes who are obliged by America’s material strengths to behave in an irregular mode. But, the



conduct of war is not the issue here, it is not what war is all about. Historian Peter Browning provides some useful clarification, beyond, that is, the bedrock of Clausewitz's dictum that "[w]ar, therefore, is an act of policy."<sup>36</sup> Browning explains that "[w]arfare is the act of making war. War is a relationship between two states or, if a civil war, two groups. Warfare is only a part of war, although the essential part."<sup>37</sup>

The United States has some history of being unpleasantly surprised: in minor key by its difficulty in translating military success into strategic success; and in major key by the problem of turning strategic success or advantage into a political victory that can be expressed in a desirable postwar settlement. The United States has been surprised in war after war, and in imbroglios great and small, to discover that somehow, somewhere, it had misplaced the glue that should connect its undoubted military prowess with its anticipated political reward. This surprise, notwithstanding its magnitude, in theory at least is eminently avoidable. All that is required is a sound strategic education. Unfortunately, though, the principal source of the problem lies not with particular officials, who can be easily replaced, but rather with national strategic and military cultures that approach warfare and politics as unduly distinctive behaviors.

My charge is that the United States has favored a way of war, more aptly perhaps a way with war, which has deprived its warriors, and the country, of political rewards earned and deserved by their blood. Given that our subject is the superpower guardian of world order, this allegation is no small matter. We must not exaggerate. There have been politically effective exercises of U.S. military power. By far the most impressive example was the Civil War. But, alas, we cannot count on having an Abraham Lincoln on hand when we need him. There have been too many cases, both great and small, when American military effort was not directed, or exploited, effectively for the political, and other (e.g., humanitarian), purposes of the enterprise. Those cases include World War I; World War II in Europe; the worst phases of the Korean War; Vietnam, of course; Lebanon; Iraq in 1991; Somalia in 1993; Kosovo in 1999; Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003. Military victory is always important, nay vital. But it is no guarantor of policy triumph. It is not as yet clear to this commentator that the undoubtedly worthy and worthwhile momentum of military transformation is going to feed very usefully into the transformation that the United States needs most urgently. Above all else, the United States needs

a transformation in its ability to wield the sword with political skill. There is a word for this function, it is strategy.

It is not very helpful to criticize American society, and by extension its armed forces, for being and acting as they have to be and do. Nonetheless, with appropriate acknowledgement to Sun-tzu, it should be useful to remind people that accurate self-knowledge is at least as important as is knowledge of the enemy.<sup>38</sup> In its more technological variants, the contemporary American process of military transformation rests heavily upon, indeed requires, "information dominance."<sup>39</sup> The Army's vision is more sophisticated, as one would expect, given its focus on the warriors rather than their tools.<sup>40</sup> But it has yet to be demonstrated that a transforming force will strive as seriously to understand the enemy as it will to locate him for his obliteration. I suggest that there is inadequate appreciation of the apolitical bias in American strategic thought and action. The information dominance that is the ambition of some "transformers" is apt to be too narrowly military in conception. The U.S. way in warfare systematically prejudices its policy goals. The revolution in approach that is needed may prove to be beyond attainment by a nonpermissive American culture. Although Americans are justly proud of their adaptability, that useful virtue is constrained by culture.

On a slightly brighter note, it is worth saying that the beginning of the process of identifying answers has to be discovery of the right questions. Frank, if uncomfortable, recognition that the United States has systemic difficulty translating military excellence into political results can be the beginning of a broader approach to transformation. We shall return to this central matter in a later section.

## **Levels of Analysis.**

4. *The geopolitical context is the most important.* Most analyses of surprise distinguish strategic, operational, and tactical levels of concern, while some extend their reach to encompass the technological also. Those studies are drawn inevitably into the on-going and long-running debate over intelligence and how to improve it. That literature is mature and useful in its way, but, nonetheless, typically it misses the level of analysis that should be accorded logical and practical priority. Namely, the literature on surprise, strategic and other, is not rich in its treatment of geopolitical context. Since all our strategic concerns,

including anxieties over surprise attack, flow ultimately from the character of their historical context, this neglect, even omission, is as strange as it is unfortunate.

Context, from the Latin *contextere*, has two meanings. It may refer to “that which surrounds,” which now is its everyday meaning, while also it can mean “that which weaves together.”<sup>41</sup> When we worry about strategic surprise, especially in connection with a long-term program of military transformation, the enquiry should begin with geopolitical contextual, rather than strategic, operational, or tactical uncertainties. Problems at those levels derive basically from the political context which gives them meaning. In case the trajectory of this monograph seems to have strayed into remote terrain, I will state my purpose here in the most direct manner possible. It is of the utmost importance to address the question of the character of the global environment for which we are transforming the Armed Forces. Surprise at this level of concern has a way of triggering traumatic consequences. The familiar kinds of analyses which treat strategic, operational, and tactical surprise, do not usually raise their sights to consider the context for it all. Lest inadvertently I am sending the wrong message, I must rush to declare my enthusiasm for measures judged useful to reduce the possibility of our being caught by strategic, operational, and tactical surprise. I am far from dismissive of the importance of that perpetual endeavor. However, this analysis takes a different tack, one which approaches military transformation more from the perspective of the source of challenges to its adequacy and appropriateness. To fit what kind of a world is the Army transforming itself? What range, quantity, and intensity of duties will, or plausibly might, U.S. foreign policy lay upon the Army?

It would not be wholly unreasonable to argue that the questions just posed are neither researchable nor answerable. After all, the future has not happened, and the planned transformation does not, to the best of my knowledge, carry any promise of time travel. Unfortunately, my questions are neither merely rhetorical, nor are they academic in a pejorative sense. DoD is committed to a long-term process of transformation which must shape military capability, and hence its utility as an instrument of policy, for decades ahead. What does the Army know, or think it knows, about the world of 20 or 30 years hence for which it is now in the process of transforming itself? Of course, there is an obvious sense in which the answer to such a

question is above the paygrade of military professionals. We hire and fire politicians to decide such things. Nonetheless, there is a great chain of reasoning which connects the Army's transformation plans, dynamic as they must be, to working assumptions about the contexts for which those plans will need to be well enough suited. That "great chain" comprises the latest *National Security Strategy* (2002), *Quadrennial Defense Review* (2001), *The National Defense Strategy* (2005), and *National Military Strategy* (2004) documents, which provide guidance for the *Army Campaign Plan*, a design which specifies the assumptions on which it is based.<sup>42</sup> Fortunately, we are far from blind when peering into the future, even without the benefit of crystal balls or time travel. As a practical matter, whether one is optimistic or pessimistic about defense planners' abilities to "get it right enough" for the medium-term future, those responsible officials have no choice but to do their best from a situation of irreducible fundamental uncertainty. A scholar, supposedly expert, can make faulty predictions, and move on to the next project with no apparent adverse consequences. The rare exception would be the "expert" who enjoyed a quality of access to policymaking that enabled him to infect that process with his erroneous guidance.

The news is by no means all of doom and gloom, as the next section makes suitably plain. There are ways to minimize the risk that the Armed Forces will transform themselves into a military instrument significantly unsuited to the world in which they must operate. For now, however, it is necessary to highlight, explain, and illustrate historically, the primacy of context.

The context for U.S. national security truly is a unity. Each relevant dimension impinges upon, and interweaves with, the others. However, it is convenient and useful to identify three contexts, never forgetting that this trinity is compatible with the essential unity referred to above. The contexts which will fuel strategic surprise are the geopolitical, the cultural, and the technological. These are not neatly distinctive, fenced-off realms. Furthermore, the geopolitical is by far the most important of the three.

Politics is about power. War is about politics. If organized violence is not politically motivated, it is not war. It has to follow that war, strategy, and defense preparation, including military transformation, of course, also are about power. But what is the power, really the relative power, story for which the Army is in the process of transforming

itself? Rephrased, what should today's transformers understand, and assume, about the relevant geopolitical future? Errors committed at this most elevated level of analysis could literally lose us the country. We might choose to recall a comment by one of Hitler's intimates, shortly before his meeting with destiny at Nuremberg. Field Marshall Keitel, not a man generally known for his wisdom, observed that errors in tactics and operations can be corrected in a current war, while mistakes in strategy can be corrected only in the next. One should add that Germany failed to abide by that principle. The higher the level of concern, the more serious the stakes. The level of concern for our contemporary transformers does not come any more elevated than the geopolitical context.

Tectonic, apparently nonlinear, shifts in the geopolitical context happen. In fact, they happen not infrequently. Consider the differences in the U.S. geopolitical context between the 1900s and the late 1910s, the 1930s and the early 1940s, the mid-1940s and the Cold War decades, and the 1980s and the 1990s. In the 1980s, for excellent reasons, the U.S. Armed Forces prepared for a geopolitical context that was to vanish in less than a decade. One might add that the preparation was not wholly unconnected with the geopolitical revolution in question.<sup>43</sup> The 1990s, the post-Cold War era, was a no-name decade that had no dominant organizing geopolitical feature. American primacy was recognized, but not really articulated or very productively exercised. 9/11 changed all that.

Is the Army transforming itself for a geopolitical context wherein the United States will long, indeed indefinitely, remain the unchallenged military hegemon? Does it need to adjust, albeit painfully, to a world wherein it will not require the ability to wage "heavy" combat against major states, and perhaps not against states at all? Should it "lighten up," perhaps "down," and become ever more Special Forces (SF)-like in order to fit suitably into a geopolitical context wherein America's enemies are variably, but emphatically, irregular? The answers to questions such as these are of the highest importance for the shape and direction of the long process of military transformation. Fortunately, it is possible to provide answers in which at least some confidence can be placed. On the evidence available at present, the Army is adapting itself prudently for a future that may include combat against both regular and irregular enemies. Moreover, the Army recognizes that even regular adversaries are likely to rely heavily on "asymmetric

means” so as “to mitigate their relative disadvantage.”<sup>44</sup> It is reassuring to note the Army’s explicit recognition that “[t]hreats from potentially hostile regional powers remain.”<sup>45</sup>

Strategic surprise on the greatest of scales occurs as a result of changes in the contexts for national security. Although we identified a contextual trinity of politics, culture, and technology, as the prime sources of strategic upheaval, we also insisted that politics, rephrased as the geopolitical for its relevance to war and strategy, is the driver among those contexts. For example, by far the most significant systemic shock to U.S. national security over the past 20 years was the abrupt retirement of the Soviet enemy from the geopolitical field of honor. This was one of history’s rarities, a benign great strategic surprise. The information revolution and the consequent debate about revolution in military affairs (RMA) and military transformation appear to many people to register high on the Richter scale of strategic importance. Nonetheless, the issues in those debates pale into near insignificance compared with the impact of the alteration to the geopolitical landscape caused by the reduction of the superpower column from two to one.

Although one could attempt to consider the contexts—geopolitical, cultural, and technological—as independent variables, indeed many studies do so, that approach is not favored here. Turning first to the cultural context for national security as a possible source of strategic surprise, I am not persuaded that it is a context superior to, or greatly influential over, the geopolitical dimension.<sup>46</sup> And I say that as a long time advocate of the necessity for cultural study in strategy.<sup>47</sup> At least, that is what I believe about the United States. My claim is that American culture, insofar as it bears upon attitudes towards national defense and war itself, is far more shaped by, than shaping, the geopolitical context. This is not claimed as an eternal, let alone a universal truth. It is, however, a claim with a powerful reach. For example, it appears to be the case that, for a variety of historical reasons, “Old Europe” has entered what amounts to a post-modern, post-military era. Many of the societies of “Old Europe” have become thoroughly debellized.<sup>48</sup> This commonly noted phenomenon expresses: reactions to the bloody history of Europe in the 20th century; the strategic fact that those societies have been security wards of the U.S. superpower for more than 50 years; and a perilous assumption that good security times are here to stay, irreversibly and therefore indefinitely. The anti-military culture of “Old Europe” is the product

primarily of its currently permissive geopolitical context. Europeans have discerned no need to take their own defense seriously. It is a logical next step to convert a necessity into a virtue. They appear not to have noticed, or perhaps have chosen to ignore, the several signals from Moscow indicating an intention to restore some of its global status and influence, probably in loose strategic and economic association with a rising China.

In the American case, culture is not plausible as a potential source of strategic surprise. Although culture, by definition, must reflect deep-seated attitudes and habits, it is also very much a living context, subject to influence by reactions to unfolding events. That claim presumes that American culture is fundamentally permissive of a wide range of foreign and defense policy behaviors, depending upon circumstances. It is always possible that some populist politician might appeal successfully to the isolationist strain in American society. If that were to happen, the strategic surprise effect upon the national military posture could, indeed should, be profound. However, this enquiry is not persuaded that that event is at all likely. It is judged improbable even if the country, performing as global sheriff, suffers much pain and disappointment and, as a consequence, becomes seriously resentful at the ingratitude of what, not without irony, is referred to as the international community.<sup>49</sup> This may not be true for all time, but at least for now it is reasonably clear that the cultural context for U.S. national security is a variable dependent upon perceptions of the country's geopolitical context. In the 1990s, American society did not much care about the Balkans or the Horn of Africa, hence the spate of writings on the need for a "post-heroic" American style in war.<sup>50</sup> There are, of course, demographic and other sociological explanations for a potentially policy- and strategy-enervating societal aversion to the suffering, or even infliction, of casualties. But, on balance, both careful study and experience tell us that the claim for an extreme U.S. casualty aversion is a myth, provided Americans really care about the mission in question.<sup>51</sup> What American society will not tolerate is the conduct of hostilities in a half-hearted manner by an administration that seems to have no notion of, or serious commitment to, victory. American society is not likely to provide the kind of unpleasant strategic surprise which would inhibit or prohibit perilous geopolitical behavior. Culture follows politics, at least usually it does so.

The third context potentially of importance for strategic surprise is the technological. I will declare boldly, perhaps rashly, that technological surprise is not a likely strategic problem for the U.S. military. The depth, breadth, and consistency of the U.S. commitment to military technological excellence, backed up by a civilian sector technologically of the first rank, all but guarantee against the surprise emergence of a technological shortfall potentially lethal to national security. In fact, the news is even better than that. So many and various are the possible ways in joint warfare, so diverse and complex are today's tools of the military trade, that it would be highly implausible to anticipate strategic disaster for reason of a particular technological failing. That is the good news. The less good news is that the prudent focus for concern is not so much upon new technologies, but rather upon how other countries' or groups' ways of war might choose to employ them. Some American commentators, reasonably, but alas incorrectly, believe that, in its information-led RMA/transformation, the U.S. defense establishment is simply leading the way in the modern way in warfare.<sup>52</sup> Given the global diffusion of information technology (IT), and given a *presumed* universal military meaning to common technological knowledge, it should follow that to know the American way is to know the future for all who aspire to master the state of the art in military affairs. Unfortunately, the world does not work like that. The reasons why it does not are both geopolitical and cultural. Geopolitically, America's rivals will pick and choose from the technological menu so as to privilege their unique strategic advantages and hopefully to compensate for their deficiencies. Also, it so happens that there is not and never has been a truly common "grammar" of war.<sup>53</sup> Different belligerents will have their own views on how a basically common technology should be exploited. An outstanding recent collection of essays on the impact of local culture upon the consequences of the diffusion of technology and ideas offers these cautionary words among its findings:

One of the central contributions of this volume is to alert practitioners to be cautious in their expectations that the spread of new military knowledge is easy or straightforward. It cannot be easily controlled, nor held back indefinitely. This is so for several key reasons. First, culture will *continue to shape the development and diffusion of military knowledge, producing indigenous adaptations that will be difficult to predict*. True emulation is rare, implying that others will probably not leverage the IT-RMA the same way as the United States.<sup>54</sup>



In a small gem of a book, Paul Hirst makes much the same point, only more broadly. He advises that “[w]ar is driven by ideas about how to use weapons and military systems almost as much as it is by technical and organizational changes themselves. Ideas are thus crucial . . .”<sup>55</sup>

To summarize the argument of this section: technology does not pose a significant threat of strategic surprise; rather does the challenge lie in the unexpected uses that other strategic cultures may choose to make of it. Overall, such uses would constitute grave threats to U.S. national security only because of a geopolitical context characterized by notable rivalries. Technology and culture and the strategic surprises to which they might be crucial are strictly dependent variables. They depend upon the political context for their strategic meaning.

Probably the most telling illustration of my argument that the geopolitical context is king is to suggest a not entirely fanciful future wherein the United States finds itself opposed not by mere “regional powers,” but instead by what could amount to a “bloc” of states led by a Sino-Soviet axis. There are many reasons why this may not occur, but the prospect of the emergence of an effectively global superpower adversary is a distinct possibility. The point here is not to suggest its likelihood, but rather to indicate that such an unwelcome development would have the most serious implications for U.S. defense plans and posture. The Army’s transformation design favors agility and adaptability, and seeks to be capable of achieving full spectrum dominance in combat. All of which is admirable. However, the return of what would amount to geopolitical bipolarity, most probably with Europe striving to be neutral, would have to mean the maturing of a quality, quantity, and variety of strategic challenge beyond the scope of current policy assumptions. This hypothetical case is cited not as a prediction, but rather, to repeat, as an illustration of relative importance of the geopolitical context.

## **Conclusions: Implications for the Army.**

Thus far the monograph has taken the problem, actually the condition, of future strategic surprise exceedingly seriously. That attitude, of course, is mandated by the nature of the subject; the stakes may be high. However, we are far from helpless in the face of strategic history’s potential to ambush us. At least, we are far from helpless

if we keep our balance, respect what history can teach us if we so allow, and if we take sensible precautions. Each of the three points of the argument presented here as “Conclusions” are constructive and fundamentally optimistic.

5. *Do not exaggerate the dangers from surprise.* The now distant, but still culturally potent, example of Pearl Harbor, the trauma of 9/11, and the rediscovery of the ancient attractions of preemption have served to elevate awareness of surprise attack in official and public consciousness. There is no denying that attacks apparently “out of the blue” can wreak severe damage. The tactical success of such attacks generally is attributable to the facts that ample signals of intention were lost amidst the noise, or that policymakers chose not to believe what their intelligence arms were trying to tell them. The pathologies of intelligence gathering, assessment, and use, for policy, have been well-explored by scholars, as well as revealed by retired officials, and need no further comment here. But how important is strategic surprise? More precisely, how significant might be its effects? During the Cold War, no clever briefing team in either capital stood much of a chance of persuading political leaders that a massive surprise nuclear attack could succeed in disarming the enemy, or otherwise rendering him incapable of retaliation. This is not to deny, however, that a cool appraisal of the possible danger did not always triumph over a predisposition to believe the worst.<sup>56</sup> Obviously, surprise, or very short warning, nuclear attack was possible, and its effects must have been close to, if not actually, history-ending for both parties, as well as many others. From the mid 1960s at least, it was never plausible to anticipate comprehensive success from a would-be disarming first strike. In principle, the peril of large-scale nuclear attack remains today. For now, though, the geopolitical context renders the danger strictly notional, since the only possible candidate for the role of villain-disarmer, the Russian Federation, lacks the necessary political motivation, at least so far as we can tell.<sup>57</sup> As we keep insisting, the condition of potential strategic surprise is driven by the geopolitical context, not by technology, culture, or clever briefers.

History is our only guide to the future.<sup>58</sup> It never repeats itself in detail, but the problems and opportunities it reveals from the past do not alter generically. That is the basic reason why the writings of those contemporaries, Thucydides and Sun-tzu, and their even more brilliant distant successor, Clausewitz, still speak to us meaningfully.

The feasibility of strategic surprise assuredly has increased with the advent of air power, ballistic missiles, and the exploitation of computers in war. But history alerts us to the fact that surprise is no panacea solution to war's imponderables. As a matter of record, surprise attacks rarely have the effects that lead their perpetrators to gain decisive victory. The law of unintended consequences strikes ruthlessly. If anything, the surprise attacker, trusting in deception and cunning to offset real weaknesses, is wont to begin a conflict that it cannot finish.<sup>59</sup> When great faith is placed in the presumed potency of strategic surprise, the failure, or only partial success, of that "Plan A," is likely to leave the aggressor unprepared with a suitable "Plan B." Indeed, most likely it is the infeasibility of any attritional "Plan B" that drives the choice for a "Plan A" designed to paralyse the foe's power of resistance and thereby register instant success.

The peril of strategic surprise is a condition of international and national security. The danger is real, particularly for a militarily hegemonic superpower that is acting in the role of sheriff of world order. America's enemies are all but obliged to seek to suspend the dialectic of war, to quote Wirtz again. Only by seizing and keeping the initiative, by paralyzing America's ability to act effectively, can materially weak enemies aspire to win. Exactly what would be won, and for how long, are, of course, highly salient questions. As was cited earlier, one must ask the most characteristic of strategist's questions, "So what?" So what that the United States might be surprised strategically? A superpower with a global security remit cannot anticipate or prevent surprise attacks of all kinds, in all places, at all times. But what really would be at risk? What would be the effect of surprise, not only upon the victim, but also upon the policy, strategy, and behavior of the assaulted superpower?

Strategic surprise is not a metaphorical "silver bullet." Its attempt is more likely to prove ultimately self-defeating than to be the high road to decisive victory. Competent, or better, armed forces are alert to the perils of surprise attack, just as they themselves must be ready to undertake such a task if so directed by policy. We have argued that the problem is not surprise per se, it is the effect of surprise. And that effect is easy to exaggerate. Our global media are in the entertainment business. They thrive on the musings of the "threat of the month" club. Since strategic surprises do happen, as 9/11 reminded us, and their effects can be extremely damaging, governments and their

armed forces are obliged to concede the reality of potential peril. The fact that the risks and even the prospective effects of strategic surprise are readily exaggerated, does not remove the official obligation to be prepared. But, how does one prepare for surprise and its effects? It is to this practical matter that we now must turn.

6. *Minimum regrets must be a guiding principle.* The Army cannot transform itself by targeting the particulars of future strategic surprise. Recall the mantras: the unknown is unknown, and the impossible is impossible. Those truisms duly granted, fortunately the strategic future is far from a closed book. Thanks primarily to the great Prussian, we are blessed with an excellent, empirically founded, theory of war. That theory is of universal and permanent validity in its essentials. Clausewitz argued persuasively that “[a]ll wars are things of the *same* nature.”<sup>60</sup> So although transformation will change some of the equipment, organization, doctrine, and generally perhaps the military culture as a whole, though that has to be less certain, it will not change the nature of war, at least not the “objective” nature.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, military transformation may well alter the character of the warfare we wage, war’s “subjective” nature as Clausewitz expressed it, though we dare not forget the inconvenient fact that enemies will have something to contribute to that character. However, war’s changing character is hardly a fact of profound significance for national security with respect to the challenge of strategic surprise.

The proud contemporary American military establishment has to be careful lest its commitment to a politically somewhat, indeed necessarily, unfocused process of transformation obscures the prospect of fighting on terms that it will not prefer. The Army recognizes this problem, and talks sensibly about adaptive adversaries who will seek and “discover niche conventional and unconventional capabilities.”<sup>62</sup> It is one thing to say that in all sincerity. It is something else again to have the mindset able to cope with the unexpected. That is a matter of military culture. We have emphasized the inevitability of strategic surprise, the need to recognize that the problem lies mainly with surprise effect, and the overwhelming importance of the geopolitical context. That context is literally unknown and unknowable, but prudent guesswork is both necessary and feasible.

The U.S. military knows that it must be prepared for combat with both regular and irregular enemies. Moreover, it knows also that even future regular enemies are near certain to conduct warfare

somewhat irregularly, asymmetrically if one prefers. They will need to do so if they are to evade and offset America's great strengths in regular conventional combat. One should not make too much of the mystery that surrounds future strategic history. For example, as was outlined illustratively above, it is possible, even probable, that there will be a radical change in the geopolitical context characterized most significantly by a return of active great-power rivalry. In that event, China, with or without a Russian consort, is by far the leading candidate to play the starring role in opposition to the U.S. hegemon. Predictable capabilities support this view, as does an unsentimental appreciation of China's political and strategic culture. Some among us believe that China will mature in its modernization into a contented and generally cooperative, profit-maximizing trading partner in a U.S. policed world order. People of that opinion would do well to ponder these words written by the eminent cultural historian, Adda B. Bozeman:

[I]t is noteworthy that the Chinese themselves have traditionally conceptualized the Middle Kingdom not as one bounded state in the company of others, but as a civilization so uniquely superior that it cannot be presumed to have frontiers. This self-view spawned China's insistently Sinocentric worldview; sanctioned imperial schemes of military and political expansion; and sustained several politically and culturally potent ideas of imperial administration, chief among them the notion of the emperor's "heavenly mandate" and the concept of a family of unequal and inferior nations held together by the "Imperial Father"—images persuasively concretized throughout the centuries by the tribute system and the well-organized dependence on hedge-guarding satellites and surrogates.<sup>63</sup>

The inalienable uncertainty over the timing and character of future policy demands for their services compels the U.S. Armed Forces to adopt an approach to their transformation best understood as one of minimum regrets. Rephrased, it has to be the goal of defense planners to make only minor errors in their planning. For example, one might well come to regret having fewer batteries deployed for the purpose of national missile defense than events demonstrate to be desirable. However, such regret would likely be as nothing compared with the regret one might have were the country to deploy no such missile defense at all, and were an unsporting enemy to notice and exploit that strategic vacancy. The great challenge in defense planning is to

design and execute a surprise effect-tolerant military posture. The surprise in question could take the form of an unanticipated character of demand by U.S. foreign policy for strategic support, in addition to unexpected unpleasantness initiated from abroad.

Success for defense planners, including those currently driving the process of transformation, can be explained in the vernacular as getting the big things right enough. Phrased as a blessing for such people, we would say, "may our future regrets over your decisions be only minor." As a pervasive attitude, a determination to strive for a military condition of minimum regrets helps usefully to counter undue enthusiasm for a focus on the threat of *this* month or year.

7. *The operational level is not the whole of war.* Is the U.S. Army pursuing the most appropriate vision in its transformation? In war after war, the U.S. military has been surprised to learn, actually relearn, that there is far more to war than warfare. In addition, it is apt to forget that war is about peace, it is not a sporting event wherein performance is measured by its own endogenous rules and metrics. America's professional military culture has been deeply hostile to any blurring of the line between politician and soldier. Peace is the business of civilians, while the waging of war is the business of military professionals.<sup>64</sup> There is much to commend that culture. Unfortunately, though, the way in which the soldier approaches and performs his expert military duty can, indeed almost invariably must, have profound political implications. In practice the realms of policy and warfare influence each other continuously, even in areas that appear to be strictly political or strictly military. The outcome to World War I, and the manner of its termination by an armistice (contrary to General Pershing's preference, we must add), taught a valuable lesson about the connection between the waging and conclusion of war, and the provision of political fuel for a follow-on event.<sup>65</sup> The U.S. part in the defeat of Germany in World War II revealed to many people the umbilical tie between the conduct of war and the character of the succeeding peace and international order. For at least the last 18 months of the war, Stalin was fighting more for the peace settlement that he wanted than for the most efficient demise of German military power. The United States, in contrast, was fighting almost strictly with reference to the course of the war. Moreover, America's impatience to transfer all its military effort to the war in the Pacific was decidedly unhelpful in its conduct of the closing phases of the war in

Europe. Over Korea, the United States learned that its enemies were conducting grand strategy, not military strategy. The Chinese fought and negotiated seamlessly. Mao-Tse tung, we know, was an admiring student of Clausewitz.<sup>66</sup> The core of my residual uneasiness about the current process of U.S. military transformation, despite the admirable sentiments expressed in its guiding documents, lies in these words by the Prussian:

Once again: war is an instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy and measure by its standards. The conduct of war, in its great outline, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws.<sup>67</sup>

To continue the history lesson, in Vietnam the Military Advisory Command Vietnam (MACV), though admittedly not the Marines, waged the war ineffectively in at least two major respects. The nature of the conflict was misunderstood, with the result that a military solution was sought to what, fundamentally, was a political challenge that could be met effectively only by local indigenous effort. As if that were not damaging enough, even the military dimension of the war was conducted in good part inappropriately, because MACV did not comprehend, let alone favor, counterinsurgency, and in particular failed to give first priority to the provision of security to the bulk of the population.<sup>68</sup>

More recently, the two wars against Iraq again revealed repeatedly that American military prowess was not cashed at close to its full value in political returns. This was unfortunate because those anticipated returns were, after all, what the fighting was all about. It may seem that these critical observations are unfair. One might object on the grounds that: I exaggerate the extent of the divorce between U.S. military strategy and operations and U.S. policy; and that I lay fault on the Armed Forces, when, if fault there be, it lies principally with civilian policymakers. In reply, I would deny exaggeration, but agree that the ultimate responsibility for the American way of war and its performance as an instrument of policy certainly rests with civilians rather than soldiers.<sup>69</sup>

The concluding argument of this monograph, the one that binds together all that has gone before, is that there has been, and remains,

all too consistently, a principal weakness in the American approach to war and peace. That weakness is a failure to regard and employ force as *political* behavior for political purposes, which is to say for policy. Time after time, the American problem with the permanent condition of possible strategic surprise has stemmed from unpreparedness for the political consequences of military action. The American practical divorce of military and political behaviors creates a vulnerability to being surprised by the actions of enemies and allies who do not maintain that separation. In addition, the political consequences of American military action frequently have been unanticipated.

The argument here is not a criticism of the contemporary process of military transformation. On the contrary, it is supportive and complementary. But it does reflect the judgment that the planned transformation needs to be conducted with even greater awareness than is evidenced already of the indissoluble connection between military behavior and political consequences. The U.S. Armed Forces today are committed to a long-term process of cumulatively radical change which should enable them to be even more proficient in the waging of a style of high technology warfare in which they are already the world leader by a country mile and more. In addition, American forces should be more capable of meeting irregular foes on appropriate terms. There is no denying that, in common with the German Army in both world wars and the Israeli Defense Forces since, the U.S. Army today and tomorrow is most adept both tactically and especially in the conduct of deadly joint warfare by superior operational skills. All of which is highly praiseworthy, at least up to a point. The history of German, Israeli, and American operational dexterity reveals, however, admittedly what everybody knows, that there is a lot more to war than the operational level. Undoubtedly the Germans were proficient at operations, just as today the U.S. Armed Forces are lethal with their operational skill in decisive maneuver facilitated by precise firepower, delivered largely from the air.<sup>70</sup> But why it is that all three countries have had monumental difficulties functioning competently at the strategic and grand strategic levels of war? Of course, one can argue that the current transformation, with its goal of providing truly agile and adaptable forces for all contingencies, should make a large difference for the better in the fit of American military power with the demands of policy. However, a little reflection raises the thought



that the transformation may not really reach the principal zone of U.S. weakness, which is the no-man's land of strategy that has to connect the political to the military.

The evidence provided by U.S. experience in and after recent wars suggests strongly that the process of military transformation, though desirable in itself, focuses attention on a relatively minor problem, while leaving the major challenge unaddressed and perhaps even unrecognized. Through transformation, the Army, for example, should improve its ability to defeat both regular and, hopefully, irregular enemies. Those who believe that much of the Army can become SF-like in response to a changing strategic context are, alas, fooling themselves. Not only must the Army remain capable of defeating any and every regular foe in heavy combat, it also has growing need of SF truly worthy of the name. Immature young soldiers are not appropriate SF material. At least they are not for so long as the SF are not so expanded, coopted, and eventually melded into the rest of the Army that they lose much of their distinctive quality.<sup>71</sup>

By all means, let the Armed Forces innovate and improve their fighting power. That is not at issue. I am in full agreement with the writer for *The Economist* who observed recently that, "[s]uccess in battle, according to one military maxim, may not, on its own, assure the achievement of national security goals, but defeat will guarantee failure."<sup>72</sup> What is at issue is whether the process of transformation is in danger of fostering a military culture that values military skills, especially combat skills, almost for their own sake. For once, history reveals a clear lesson to those Americans willing to learn. It tries to tell us that by far the most serious inhibitor of U.S. strategic effectiveness is a seemingly systemic difficulty in employing military force in ways that promote the chosen political goals. The strategic surprises that have ambushed U.S. national security performance overwhelmingly have been political, not military, in kind. Military transformation is close to irrelevant to the real problem that persistently constrains the value of U.S. strategic prowess.

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War is about peace. Peacetime preparation is about being able to conduct the wars that might erupt in a manner that serves political ends, or, more valuable still, it is about deterrence. To repeat the

familiar refrain, there is more to war than warfare. Above all else, war is about the kind of peace that should follow. As a consequence, war needs to be waged in a way that does not compromise political interests. Recognition of the importance of these elements of the lore of war and peace is the high road to achieving a marked reduction in the incidence and severity of unpleasant strategic surprise. Of course, there is everything to be said in favor of a U.S. Army that can transform itself into becoming all that it can be. Would that that were the primary challenge. Unfortunately it is not, as this monograph has sought to argue.

## ENDNOTES

1. S. Douglas Smith, book review, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. LVII, No. 1, Winter 2004, p. 147.

2. Arthur C. Clarke, quoted in Primo Levi, *The Search for Roots—A Personal Anthology*, London: Allen Lane, 2001, p. 188. I am grateful to John B. Sheldon for bringing this wise judgment by Clarke to my notice.

3. Colin S. Gray, *Strategic Studies and Public Policy: The American Experience*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982, chs.3-4; Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New-Look National Security Policy, 1953-61*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996; and Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 3rd edn., Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, ch. 6.

4. U.S. strategic offensive force loadings increased from 330 warheads in 1950 to 1,418 by 1954. Natural Resources Defense Council, "Table of US Strategic Offensive Force Loadings, 1945-75, 1976-2012," August 21, 2004, <http://nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/datab1.asp>. Estimates for the Soviet Union remain uncertain. See Thomas B. Cochran and others, *Nuclear Weapons Databook, Vol. IV: Soviet Nuclear Weapons*, New York: Harper and Row, 1989, p. 25; and Pavel Podvig, ed., *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

5. See Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1982, chs. 6-9; and John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983, ch. 6.

6. Roger W. Barnett, *Asymmetrical Warfare: Today's Challenge to U.S. Military Power*, Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2003, is particularly useful.

7. Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, Washington DC: Department of Defense, 2002, pp. 10-11, <http://www.defenselink.mil/execsec/adr2002/index.htm>.

8. For example, in his pathbreaking study of friction, Barry D. Watts concedes: "The objection, which has been consciously ignored to this point, is that the unified concept of general friction (*Gesamtbegriff einer allgemeinen Friktion*) embraces so much of war that it does not provide a very precise instrument for analyzing the phenomena at issue." *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War*, McNair Paper 52, Washington, DC: National Defense University, October 1996, p. 122.

9. Politics and policy are not deployed interchangeably in this monograph. Definitions of these key concepts are notoriously contestable. The German *politik* conveniently conflates

the two, but in English we are obliged to be careful. Politics is about government, broadly understood. It is about power. In the words of the classic formula, politics is about who gets what, when, and how. We should appreciate that that claim includes the domain of ideology: whose ideas shall rule? Policy is formulated by policymakers and is the product of a political process. It is political purpose, stated in the barest of terms. By and large, policy is regarded only as the declarations of intention by policymakers, but a wider view is defensible. It can be argued that policy comprises capabilities and actions, as well as declarations. Recall the maxim, "show me your programs and I will tell you your policy."

10. I am grateful to a Strategic Studies Institute reviewer for the important example of the Central Intelligence Agency. An outstanding analysis is Michael I. Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise," in Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken, eds., *Paradoxes of Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*, London: Frank Cass, 2003, pp. 1-58.

11. See Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001; and Colin S. Gray, *Maintaining Effective Deterrence*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2003.

12. Roberta Wohlstetter introduced the vital distinction between "noise" and "signals" in her *tour de force* on Pearl Harbor: *Warning and Decision*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967.

13. John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to be Modern*, London: Faber and Faber, 2003, p. 27.

14. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 75 (hereafter cited as Clausewitz); and J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989, pp. 77-78.

So it is proposed here that a general theory of strategy should be some development of the following fundamental theme: The primary aim of the strategist in the conduct of war is some selected degree of control of the enemy for the strategist's own purpose; this is achieved by control of the pattern of war; and this control of the pattern of war is had by manipulation of the center of gravity of war to the advantage of the strategist and the disadvantage of the opponent.

15. U.S. Army, *Army Campaign Plan*, Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, April 12, 2004, p. 10. Other official Army documents studied for this analysis include: U.S. Army, *2004 Army Transformation Roadmap*, Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Army Operations, Army Transformation Office, July 2004; U.S. Army, *The Way Ahead*, Washington, DC: U.S. Army, Spring 2004; and U.S. Army, *Serving a Nation at War*, Washington, DC: Army Strategic Communications, U.S. Army, Summer 2004.

16. See Scott D. Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

17. James Wirtz, "Theory of Surprise," in Betts and Mahnken, eds., *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence*, p. 103.

18. John R. Boyd, "A Discourse on Winning and Losing," briefing, August 1987; David S. Fadok, "John Boyd and John Warden: Air Power's Quest for Strategic Paralysis," in Phillip S. Meilinger, ed., *The Paths of Heaven: Airpower Theory*, Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1997, pp. 357-98; Grant T. Hammond, *The Mind of War: John Boyd and*

*American Security*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001; and Robert Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War*, Boston: Little, Brown, 2002.

19. Clausewitz, p. 75.

20. Wirtz, "Theory of Surprise," p. 103.

21. B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, London: Pan Books, 1972, p. 325.

22. *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

23. See Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War To Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000, chs. 2-4.

24. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Final Report*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2004, p. 367.

25. Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, repr. of 1862 edn., London: Greenhill Books, 1992, p. 70.

26. Harlan Ullman and James Wade, Jr., *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996.

27. See Colin S. Gray, *The Sheriff: America's Defense of the New World Order*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

28. Clausewitz, p. 85.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

30. Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2004, p. v. (emphasis in the original). Also see Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of U.S. Military Strategy and Policy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.

31. See Sam C. Sarkesian, *America's Forgotten Wars: The Counter-revolutionary Past and Lessons for the Future*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984; and Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2002. American experience in waging war against irregulars was distilled in the U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1940, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940.

32. Today, some would argue that it is legitimate to wage war for humanitarian goals. I am skeptical of the practicality, though not the desirability, of this. Recall the aphorism that no good deed shall go unpunished.

33. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, rev.edn., London: Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 366.

34. U.S. Army, *Serving a Nation at War*, p. 5.

35. A. K. Cebrowski, *Military Transformation: A Strategic Approach*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, Fall 2003.

36. Clausewitz, p. 87.

37. Peter Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare: The Development of Land Warfare from 1792 to 1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 7.

38. Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*, Ralph D. Sawyer, trans., Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994, p. 179.

39. See Stuart E. Johnson and Martin C. Libicki, eds., *Dominant Battlespace Knowledge*, rev. edn., Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, April 1996.

40. U.S. Army, *The Way Ahead*, p. 1.

41. See Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, ch. 5, "Strategic Culture as Context."

42. U.S. Army, *Army Campaign Plan*, pp. 2-6.

43. Norman Friedman, *The Fifty-Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000, is fairly persuasive on the U.S. contribution to the fall of the USSR.

44. U.S. Army, *Army Campaign Plan*, p. 3.

45. *Ibid.*

46. The literature on strategic culture is small but growing. See Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*, London: Croom Helm, 1979; Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995; Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 1998, pp. 141-70; Victor Davis Hanson, *Why the West Has Won: Carnage and Culture from Salamis to Vietnam*, London: Faber and Faber, 2001; John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003; and Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History*, London: Routledge, 2004, especially ch. 9. For a helpful comparative discussion of the important idea of military culture, see Allan D. English, *Understanding Military Culture: A Canadian Perspective*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.

47. Colin S. Gray: *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986; and *Modern Strategy*, ch. 5.

48. Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, London: Atlantic Books, 2003, overstates a fundamentally sound argument.

49. See Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002; Gray, *The Sheriff*; and Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, London: Allen Lane, 2004.

50. Edward N. Luttwak, "Toward Post-Heroic Warfare," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 3, May/June 1995, pp. 109-122.

51. See Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, p. 467.

52. "[T]echnology is driving everyone, terrorist and armies alike, to the same tactics. What is more, most of the technology is commercially available . . . . As we have seen, the United States and Al Qaeda took the same approach to war. That is because many groups can now compete at the same level as many nation-states, and everyone is adopting similar methods, because that is what works." Bruce Berkowitz, *The New Face of War: How War Will Be Fought in the 21st Century*, New York: Free Press, 2003, pp. 16, 18. While there is some merit in Berkowitz's claims, his general assertion of tactical commonality is a dangerous fallacy.

53. Clausewitz, p. 605.

54. Emily Goldman and Andrew L. Ross, "Conclusions: The Diffusion of Military Technology and Ideas—Theory and Practice," in Goldman and Leslie C. Eliason, eds., *The Diffusion of Military Technology and Ideas*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 390 (emphasis added).

55. Paul Hirst, *War and Power in the 21st Century: The State, Military Conflict and the International System*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p. 9.
56. In the early 1980s, when the creaking leaders of the USSR persuaded themselves that the tough talk of the Reagan administration signalled more than mere rhetoric, the USSR reflected an intention to act, even at the highest level of violence. See Ben B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 War Scare*, CSI 97-10002, Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, September 1997; and Peter Vincent Pry, *War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink*, Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 1999, Part. 1.
57. In contrast to the illustrative hypothetical case in the text, in decades to come, Russia might decide that China is its principal foe, and that the United States would be an ideal ally. At present, however, Vladimir Putin's Russia seems bent upon strutting its stuff rather more forcefully on the global stage, a determination that fits well enough with China's careful policy of opposition to American dominance.
58. This claim is explained and defended at length in my book, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, forthcoming.
59. Wirtz is convincing when he argues that "[r]elying on the element of surprise, however, is extraordinarily risky." "Theory of Surprise," p. 105. Surprise may not be achieved. Even if the enemy is caught unawares, the anticipated effects of the surprise might well prove disappointing. If the attacker was driven to resort to surprise by an awareness of his inferiority in a war of attrition, any measure of surprise effect short of decisive victory should mean a war that could not be won. Had the attacker not succumbed to the temptation to gamble on surprise, he would not have dared to take the initiative. Such, of course, should be true for a rational and reasonable leadership. It so happens that risk assessment and risk tolerance can vary dramatically from person to person and regime to regime.
60. Clausewitz, p. 606 (emphasis in the original).
61. *Ibid.*, p. 85. Clausewitz's distinction between war's "objective" nature, which is unchanging, and its "subjective" nature, which is ever on the move, is well-deployed and explained in Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Globalization and the Nature of War*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2003. Clausewitz's concept of the subjective nature of war is identical in meaning to our contemporary reference to the character of war.
62. U.S. Army, *Army Campaign Plan*, p. 2.
63. Adda B. Bozeman, *Strategic Intelligence and Statecraft: Selected Essays*, Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1992, p. 197.
64. The classic explanation is Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, New York: Vintage Books, 1964, ch. 1. For a bold challenge to the classic view, see Cohen, *Supreme Command*.
65. Historians disagree, as is their wont, on whether or not the manner of war termination in 1918 and the character of the Versailles settlement, rendered a "second round" inevitable. Nothing is strictly inevitable, but the facts that German society did not feel defeated, the homeland did not suffer damage, the army returned generally in good order and bearing arms, and the terms imposed at Versailles were deemed universally to be outrageously unjust, manifestly comprised potent fuel for possible exploitation by the unscrupulous in the future. The Great Depression provided the additional push which was needed, on top

of the failings of the unloved Weimar Republic and the desire for revenge over 1918-19, for Germans to gamble on the Nazi experiment.

66. Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*, London: Pimlico, 2002, pp. 19, 138-142, is especially helpful.

67. Clausewitz, p. 610.

68. From the burgeoning, forbiddingly large literature on Vietnam, see particularly Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986; and C. Dale Walton, *The Myth of Inevitable U.S. Defeat in Vietnam*, London: Frank Cass, 2002. The latter demonstrates how well the United States performed in Vietnam, at least as measured by anxieties in Hanoi, *despite* its commission of gross political, strategic, and military errors.

69. On the important issue of whether war is too serious a business to be left to the generals, or alternatively, too serious to be left to the politicians, see Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York: Free Press, 2002.

70. For the latest scholarly word on the sources of high military performance, see Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Biddle is first-rate, but he does not attempt to address the problem that dominates my text. Modern battle is not the American challenge. Rather, the difficulty lies in waging war effectively for desirable political ends.

71. See Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998, ch. 7, "The Nature of Special Operations."

72. *The Economist*, April 3, 2004, p. 94.